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you use to
build your
theology?**

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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*From the Object passed at the
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Editor M Colleen Burns MA
46A Newmarket Road

Cringeleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover illustration created with a photo
by Miguel Saavedra

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Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: admin@inquirer.org.uk

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The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

JIHADI PALS

"And those who struggle
strive only for their own souls;
for God is independent of all worlds."

- al-Qur'an 29:6

These young men
who slip away from
dull lives in dull towns
to countries they know nothing of
to fight a war – or so they think –
for Allah and for Islam, in hope
of paradise and houris,
will they come back one day,
as others did before, to write poems
about the folly and the evil of it all?

- Cliff Reed

Editor's View

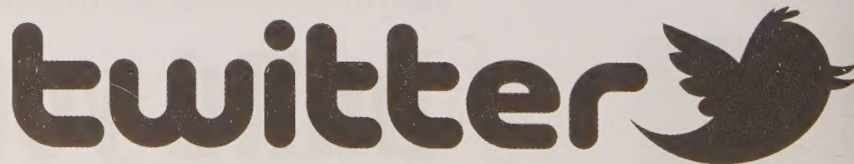
Real and imagined history

A few years ago I participated in the 'Building Your Own Theology' course, adapted from the one created for the Unitarian Universalist Association's curriculum by the Rev Richard S Gilbert (available from Essex Hall). It is an excellent course, which helps participants sift their beliefs and focus on their values as they relate to their spiritual lives. But I had never thought about building theology in such concrete terms – until I read the Rev Andrew Hill's cover story. He talks about a four-dimensional faith – incorporating the depth, width, length and the 'why', which ultimately asks, 'Why are you here?' There is some history in this issue. The Rev WG Tarrant – a former editor of *The Inquirer* and well-known Unitarian author's name once again appears in these pages as his papers were recently given to the Unitarian General Assembly by his family. In one letter, printed on page 7, he describes a visit with Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle (and hints she may have fallen asleep during the meeting).

I have finally caught up with 'The Mill', the Channel 4 drama inspired by life at the Quarry Bank Mill. Some of the drama was filmed in and around Styal. So, when Sir Tony Robinson came along to do a documentary on 'The Real Mill', his crew filmed at Norcliffe Unitarian Chapel and interviewed the minister, the Rev Alex Bradley. Both season 2 of 'The Mill' and 'The Real Mill' are available online at the 4OD website – details are in the article on page 5. Alex did an excellent job of explaining how their Unitarian faith influenced the Greg family – owners of the real-life mill.

And, one more historical perspective is presented by the Rev David Steers, who decries the selloff of some churches' communion silver. I hope his passionately argued piece can be a jumping-off point for a larger discussion as there are clearly many views on the topic.

- MC Burns



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faith in 140 characters. <https://twitter.com/>

DIY faith is the best there is

By Andrew Hill

The Yorkshire- and Hull-based poet, the late Philip Larkin, wrote a wonderful little poem about the religion he would construct, if asked. The poem, called 'Water' begins:

*If I were called in
To construct a religion
I should make use of water.*

He suggests that churchgoers ford streams on their way to services and that a glass of water be venerated in the east. (Listen to Larkin recite the poem here: <http://tinyurl.com/mopdbw>)

Now, I wonder if you and I were ever called upon to construct a religion what we would use for building blocks. Philip Larkin used water. Jim Reilly, in the hymn 'A core of silence breathes beyond all words', uses silence (in *Sing Your Faith*). Annie Dillard, the American writer, used high wind and tornadoes because in *Teaching a Stone to Speak* she says that a church is a place where: "... we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may draw us out where we can never return."

Another possibility, which occurs to me, might be flat-pack components – just like my study bookshelves from IKEA.

Avoiding the Flood Plain

Now, it's all very well having either:

- Assorted pieces of 'flat-packed' theology; or
 - Experience of howling theological storms;
- Or
- A collection of pauses, silences and quietness;

Or

- Crates and crates of bottled theological water;

Or

- Heaps of whatever raw materials you have chosen for building your own theology.

But you also need to know how to put the pieces together; and before even that, you need to survey the land wherever it is that you propose building your theology because it could be a little awkward if you happen to build it in a wrong place like the River Ouse flood plain.

The Ground of Being

So what's the right place? Well, the right place for building a personal theology is you, me, us individually. Each separate one of us is the centre of our own personal world. Each separate one of us observes and feels and hears according to our own experience and, according to no-one else's. No one else's experiences exactly match our own. Your world is your world, and my world is my world; and from the centre of our separate beings we survey our different worlds. So – get your bearings. Locate yourself according to the dimensions of your world – outwards and upwards (for height), backwards and forwards (for depth), sideways (for width) and inwards (for the fourth dimension).

- So first (for height) – look outwards and upwards, especially when the night is dark and clear, and observe a crescent moon hanging in the sky and twinkling stars overhead; and notice how sun, moon and stars come and go by night and day and season. Out there everything changes, but not without order

(Continued on next page)



Illustration created with a photo by Cris DeRaud

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Figure out your own faith's dimensions

(Continued from previous page)

and pattern. How would you describe it? What holds it all together – and how?

- Now, secondly (for depth) - look front and back, forwards and backwards. This cosmos, this world, this place seems always to have been here - parents, grandparents, cats, dogs, monkeys, fish, snowdrops. But what's ahead? Always there is something new and sometimes things even go out the back and come in again at the front. Many things seem to come and go and come again. Where do they go, and where does the new come from? Did the past make us what we are now? How does the past produce the new?

- Next, thirdly (for width) glance sideways and notice that you are not alone. There are other people around just like you, and other sorts of beasts and creepy crawlies, and grass and plants and trees and mountains. Sometimes these other things get in our way; and sometimes they want what you and I want and sometimes we fight. But sometimes we do manage things together and that turns out to be rather nice. What do we do with others? How do we cope with them? And what is feeling nice?

- Finally (for the fourth dimensions) face inwards. Maybe this is where all those human questions come from – all the 'hows?' and all the 'whens?', the 'wheres?' and the 'whos?'. Also questions about 'why?' – why are you here? What should you do? How does it all fit together? Why did something happen for someone else and not for you? How should you cope with this different treatment? Ought I do something about evening things out? Am I just here; or is there a particular reason for my being?

The DIY Store

This then is the spot and the vastness where we are; the place where we are to build our own theology. A theologian called Paul Tillich called it "the ground of our being"; and "the ground of our being" seems to be the place where, according to long time human experience, it has helped to build some sort of 'theological' shelter where vulnerable human self-esteem can grow and flourish protected from over-exposure to the immensity of the cosmos.

Some people live where traditional theologies and belief systems have long sheltered them and where they have never been too disturbed by alternate building systems. Beneath these traditional theological structures individuals make subtle adjustments when holes have appeared in the roof and let in

the rain – an intruded passage in a sacred scripture perhaps; or the discovery of the bones of an allegedly physically risen saviour. People cope with these things.

But for a great many people today traditional theological structures have been more or less blown away. The Jewish thinker Martin Buber wrote about it like this:

In the history of the human spirit I distinguish between epochs of habitation and epochs of homelessness. In the former [we] live in the universe as in a house, as in a home. In the latter, [we] live in the universe as in an open field, and at times do not even have four pegs to set up a tent.

There are a couple of things we can do when this happens. One is to go to the Religious Supermarket where marketing and packaging has become increasingly important and purchase a ready-made religious home. One very popular current Christian example is Alpha Courses which spring up everywhere like Wimpy houses.

But the other thing you can do is go to the DIY store, which is my preference. You already have the field, your "ground of being". What you need are the tent-pegs and four sessions of 'building your own theology' in order to help you construct your own personal faith:

- How everything is out there for you and how you are part of it – the first dimension (height);
- How everything is back and front from where you are – the second dimension (depth);
- How everything is beside you and how you relate to other things and to other beings – the third dimension (width); and
- How everything is inside you and how you make meaningful sense of everything – the fourth dimension.

When you have described and defined how these four things are for you – out there, back and front, beside you and inside you – you have woven your own cosmic canopy and you have built your own theology.

The Rev Andrew M Hill is a retired Unitarian minister.



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Chapel starred in 'Mill' documentary

By Kath Walker

Things were not quite what they seemed in the vicinity of Norcliffe Unitarian Chapel in Styal. A replica cottage popped up on the village green close to the lych gate for a number of weeks and disappeared, whilst massive lighting equipment on raised platforms surrounded the chapel for almost a week. A temporary graveyard emerged in the field opposite the chapel and a cast of characters including apprentices and villagers dressed in period costume with their own minister in tow, were seen parading up and down in the chapel grounds together with a troop of soldiers!

The second series of 'The Mill' was being filmed in the village and, like the sets, the story wasn't always a true depiction of



A fake graveyard outside Norcliffe Chapel.

events. To correct perceptions, a documentary entitled 'The Real Mill' was made for the purposes of clarifying 'fact from fiction'. The Rev Alex Bradley, minister at Norcliffe Chapel, a most reluctant and modest film star, spent an afternoon with the film crew of the documentary. The documentary can be seen on the Channel 4 on-demand service at: www.channel4.com/programmes/the-real-mill-with-tony-robinson or <http://tinyurl.com/m949rgj>

Keep your eyes peeled for Alex gallantly showing the crew around the chapel and enlightening them on Unitarianism and the influences it had on the Greg family over the generations.

Kath Walker is a member of Norcliffe Chapel. 'The Mill' drama is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/k28wod7>

Insuring churches is a complicated business

By David Edwards

It is hard to know where to start when writing an article about insurance because it is such a wide subject with many related issues. I will write hopefully in a relevant manner with knowledge gained from visiting many hundreds of churches and chapels over the past 25 years, and indeed we now look after 125 Unitarian churches and chapels and 2,000 places of worship in total!

The basic insurance requirements for churches to consider include the buildings, contents, items taken outside, potential legal liability to members of the public, employees and volunteers, cover for trustees and officers, publisher's indemnity, money, loss of hiring or rental income, and legal protection.

The good news is that the insurance companies (Congregational & General and Ansvar) that insure the vast majority of Unitarian churches and chapels offer bespoke church policies and a package of covers that are ideally suited to the needs of the church. The church does, of course, still need to decide what sums insured are required but does not have to worry about which covers to select as the covers mentioned in the above paragraph are usually all included automatically.

Specific issues do regularly crop up, such as the statutory inspections required for a lift or stairlift, the running of a night shelter, a mission trip overseas, the implications of the premises becoming unoccupied, the organising of an event and sometimes with other local churches, the hiring of the premises to other people and works being carried out at the church.

The most common cause of church claims is weather related, resulting in claims for storm damage, burst pipes and flood. Theft is the next most common cause in recent times, predominately theft of external metal. The next is fire, often caused by electrical issues. Malicious damage claims are also common, usually resulting in broken windows. Liability claims are on the increase in these litigious times, with trips

and falls being the most common. It is important for a church to consider the risks, and I would commend a very informative website to you – www.spow.co.uk. Each church should carry out its own fire risk assessment and also separate risks assessments for various activities taking place, either within or outside of their premises. Health and safety issues cannot be ignored and we have given much advice on this subject over the years, particularly when visiting the church and addressing any issues first hand. It is not always as complicated or daunting as it may first appear! We can provide templates for risk assessments.

It would be inappropriate to complete this article without making some reference to the issue of safeguarding minor and other vulnerable people, which has become so prevalent at this time. Liability is provided by the insurers mentioned above – although you must remember that any potential claim should be directed to the insurer in place at the time the alleged abuse occurred. Some non-specialist church insurers do not include abuse cover. Safeguarding is of paramount importance to churches who must ensure they have a process in place when selecting volunteers or employees who want to work with children and vulnerable people. It is of paramount importance that all churches have a child/vulnerable adult protection policy in place. I would recommend a specific website on this subject, namely www.ccpas.co.uk. The Unitarian General Assembly is a member of CCPAS and this organisation provides a helpline (0845 120 4550) to all congregations for any questions about safeguarding.

Information on the General Assembly's safeguarding policy is available here: <http://tinyurl.com/m3cu3lf>

David Edwards ACII CIP is director of David Edwards Insurance Brokers an agency which specialises in policies for churches. See the company website here: <http://www.deib.co.uk/> or contact David at: david@deib.co.uk

'Doubtful anyone rendered longer service'

Prominent Unitarian minister and twice editor of *The Inquirer* WG Tarrant served Unitarianism well finds **Derek McAuley**. Now his papers are coming back to the movement.

Earlier this year I was contacted by a member of the family of the Rev WG Tarrant, who was for two periods Editor of *The Inquirer* (1888-97 and 1918-27) and minister of Wandsworth Unitarian Church for 37 years. As a result of subsequent conversations, the family have presented archival material to the Unitarian General Assembly which will be deposited at Dr Williams's Library, the research library on Protestant dissent located in London.

Up from an orphanage

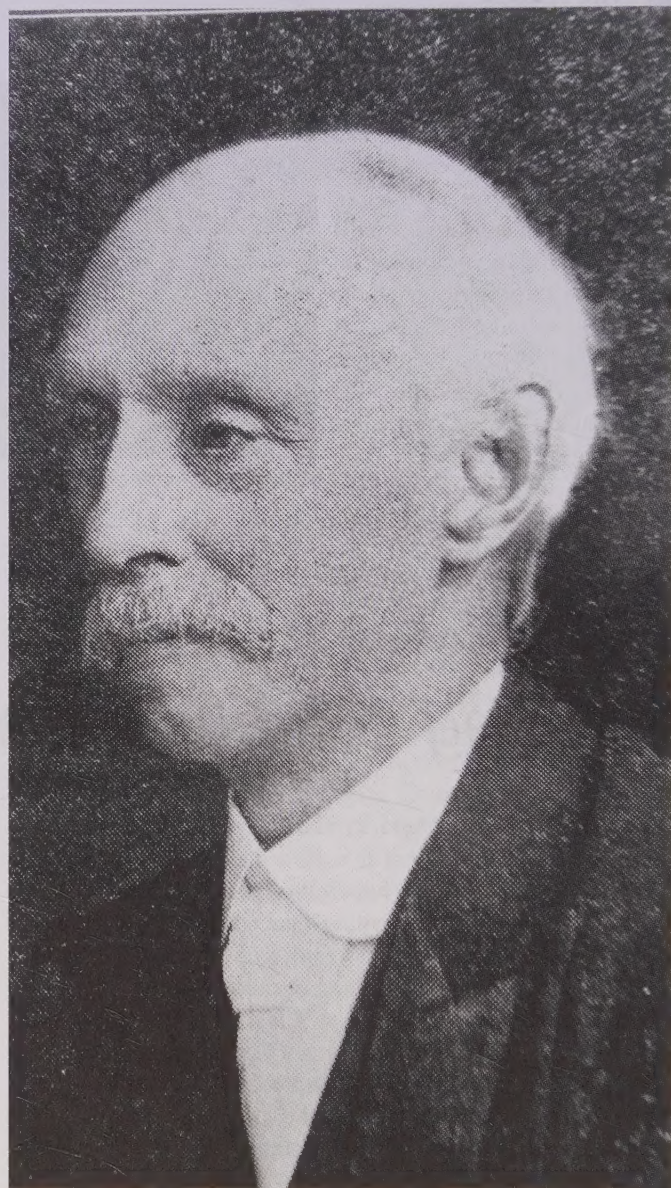
WG Tarrant was a remarkable man. His father fell at the siege of Sebastopol during the Crimea War and his mother died when he was 6 years old. He was raised and educated at an industrial orphanage and at age 14 entered an apprenticeship as a silversmith in his home town of Birmingham. Attracted by the Unitarian message, he later, at the age of 26, became a student at Unitarian College, Manchester. He then secured a Tate Scholarship and proceeded to Manchester New College, London. His first and only ministry was at the recently formed congregation in Wandsworth. He was a noted hymn writer and even today two of his hymns are included in *Hymns for Living* (the green hymnal) which is widely used in Unitarian congregations.

The material presented to Essex Hall covers various aspects of his life. We have transcripts of his early attempts to have his work published in his early 20s and certificates from this period including his passing an examination in Scripture History and Doctrine from the Sunday School Union as a teacher at Graham Street Ragged School in Birmingham.

There are several original letters, one of which describes his attendance in 1897 at the presentation of a Loyal Address to Queen Victoria by the 'Body of English Presbyterian Ministers in and near the Cities of London and Westminster' at Windsor Castle to mark her Diamond Jubilee. *The Inquirer* item of 17 July 1897 is purely factual; here we have his personal observations. Several manuscripts of hymns are included too.

Author of books and wartime publications

His literary input was considerable – in addition to many unsigned articles and reviews in *The Inquirer*. We have been presented with copies of several of his books and assorted pamphlets and booklets, including for the Unitarian Penny Library. Significantly in this Anniversary Year of the commencement of World War I we have some of his wartime publications. These include 'For Remembrance' a souvenir for all who served in the military, and also four editions of the Bulletin of Lawrence House from 1917 and 1918. Lawrence House was a hostel established next door to Essex Hall for soldiers and sailors visiting London. But the Bulletin contains much about the effects of the War on the Unitarian community and records details of all visitors, including activities overseas such as the gathering of Unitarians in Malta. He was also a



Unitarian minister, hymn writer, editor, WG Tarrant's papers will be preserved for posterity at Dr Williams's Library. Photo submitted by Derek McAuley

contributor to 'For Freedom and Right: For Men on Active Service' given to Unitarian service personnel.

Once a library trustee

There is also material relating to Alice Tarrant, the Rev Tarrant's wife. She was the second daughter of Henry Stanley, a well-known Unitarian from Manchester and founding Trustee of Strangeways Unitarian Free Church, of which a copy of the Trust Deed is unusually included. She was for 52 years a member of Wandsworth Unitarian Christian Church and contributed in so many ways to its life.

It is fitting that this material will find a home at Dr Williams's Library since the Rev Tarrant was elected a trustee in 1891 and served until his death. In a biographical sketch by the Rev W Copeland Bowie, it is written 'it is doubtful whether in the annals of the Trust anyone rendered longer and more conspicuous voluntary service than Mr. Tarrant'.

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

Tarrant offered loyalty to Queen

'She looked an old lady and not all the splendour could disguise her feebleness,' said **WG Tarrant** of Queen Victoria in his letter to his Aunt, Sarah Green, 17 July 1897

Dear Aunt,

You will see in the *Inquirer* an account of our doings at Windsor on Thursday. I will add here some small particulars. Our deputation wore gowns etc. – I had my BA gown & hood (a borrowed one!), – & we walked up thus attired to the gate of the Castle which is near to the Railway Station. As we entered, a detachment of the Coldstream Guards marched up with the Band in our honour playing outside while the Queen held her court. We were received at the Castle itself by four of the Guard in old fashioned uniforms & so entered a wide hall adorned with arms etc. & there our hats & anything else were left in charge of attendants. We were then ushered up a wide flight of stairs magnificently carpeted & with pictures & statuary here and there on the walls and so we reached one splendid hall after another, and being a little before time we went into the library & saw a number of ancient books etc.

There was a fine view from the windows, as the Castle stands high & the surrounding country is flat. It was a glorious afternoon. By and by we were led thro a set of apartments into the Crimson Drawing room, furnished in crimson & gold, & with fine hangings and pictures. The other deputations included one from the Royal Society (Science) & the gentlemen belonging to it were dressed in blue velvet with silver & gold embroidery, cocked hats, knee breeches and black swords. They looked very picturesque.

Our deputation entered the Green Drawing room after another had been in; we had been told what the order wd. be. Folding doors were opened at one end of the room & we entered bowing as we approached the Queen. She was seated on a low easy chair. Dressed chiefly in black, but having a little white about her. Behind her stood a lady in waiting & at her side was the Princess Beatrice.

I shd. think there were a dozen or more lords & ladies besides, each in place, around her, & all stood as still & looked as solid as wax figures in a show! Our secretary, Mr Harwood, read the Address, while we stood respectfully grouped around, mostly looking at the Queen I suppose. She looked an old lady and not all the splendour could disguise her feebleness. As the address went on she seemed to be a little drowsy, but she lifted her glasses by the handle – this kind of thing * - & looked us all over.

When the address was finished she spoke very nicely & simply the words reported in the paper, & turning to the

'Folding doors were opened at one end of the room & we entered bowing as we approached the Queen. She was seated on a low easy chair. Dressed chiefly in black, but having a little white about her. Behind her stood a lady in waiting & at her side was the Princess Beatrice.'



Queen Victoria and Princess Beatrice of Battenberg in May 1882. Photo by Alexander Bassano, Public Domain

gentleman beside her took a Reply from him & handed it to Mr Harwood. He then knelt down & kissed her hand with rather a smack! The two oldest of our party were also introduced & went thro the same performance & then we all bowed ourselves out, walking backwards till we reached the folding doors and could walk more comfortably.

We then went to a magnificent hall called St. Georges Hall, where the banners of the Knights of the Garter are hung. A long table furnished with silver & gold was there provided with fruit, cakes, wines, sandwiches, & other light refreshments, which were handed to us by footmen in red uniforms who evidently tried to make us feel at home. I did not try the champagne but had a modest cup of coffee. After loitering about a bit we passed thro' the state apartments again and so downstairs. At every turning there was an attendant, generally in some quaint uniform & either a sword or wand in his hand. And so we went off to the grounds of the Castle & I soon returned in the train to London to finish my editing of the paper!

So that is how your respectful nephew got presented at Court, and he considers himself several inches higher in consequence. It is a proof of his good nature, no doubt, that he continues to speak to ordinary people at all.

We are all very well, & I hope that my old lady at Sheffield is keeping well as her years will let her.

Yrs faithfully

WG Tarrant

* Here WGT inserted a small sketch of a lorgnette

Don't sell off the family silver

In recent years, some congregations have sold or given away their communion silver, while others have held on to theirs. **David Steers** argues passionately for keeping precious silver 'in the family'

I was surprised to discover, a couple of months after the sale, that the trustees of Cross Street Chapel in Manchester have sold off the congregation's communion silver. Whilst I understand the difficulties and the competing choices that all trustees must face in their management of a congregation's property and finances there is, I am afraid to say, quite a lot about this sale that I find disquieting.

First of all does Cross Street Chapel actually need this extra money? The sterling silver items from the sale appear to have fetched £17,160, according to my calculation from the published hammer prices at the auction. A goodly sum but not one that will last very long if the Chapel is in dire straits.

But leaving the financial question aside the trustees' attitude, as expressed on the Cross Street Chapel website (see <http://tinyurl.com/pb6aa9j>), appears to be that the silver is of no use to them and is better off sold to someone who wants it rather than shut away in a bank vault. The trouble with this attitude is that the trustees are also the keepers of the chapel's entire historical legacy and these few items of silver communion plate are just about all that is physically left from the original Cross Street Chapel of 1694. If a decision to dispose of the silver had to be taken – and I am very sceptical as to that being the case – then the trustees had a duty to be sure exactly what it was they were disposing of. Surely in such an instance it would be advisable to seek professional advice – perhaps consult the Unitarian Historical Society, the Chapels Society or a local museum? Indeed if the trustees could simply not bear to keep the silver any longer perhaps they could have lodged them in a local museum, for they held custody not just of a piece of Unitarian history but an important fragment of the history of Manchester.

Unfortunately when asked for information about the story of a 1752 silver flagon by the lucky purchaser (at a price of £3,200) the treasurer of the Cross Street trustees tells him (again on the Cross Street website) 'I am afraid, however, I can offer no history of it.' And he doesn't challenge the purchaser's belief 'that it was presented to the church by the Rev William Gaskell'.

Allowing this material to be sold without knowing the provenance of the items has enabled a wholly bogus story to surround their sale. The website of Adam Partridge, the auctioneers who sold them, claims bizarrely:

'Spearheading the silver section of over 300 lots was a fantastic collection of "church plate" or communion silver from the Cross Street Chapel in Manchester. What was particularly lovely about this collection was the provenance; donated to the chapel by their then-minister William Gaskell, husband of famed author Elizabeth Gaskell, in the 19th century, each piece has been beautifully engraved with the Gaskell family



The Strangeways communion silver. Photo submitted by David Steers

crest.' (See: <http://tinyurl.com/nupdaxl>)

Essentially this is nonsense, which presumably stems from confusion over the name Gaskell being engraved on some of the pieces. In fact what is engraved is 'Ex Dono N Gaskell' and the crest is his, nothing to do with William. The donor was Nathaniel Gaskell, one of the founders of the Chapel, indeed one of the four purchasers of the land on which the first Cross Street Chapel was built, an original trustee, and a friend of the Rev Henry Newcome, the first minister.

Another piece that was sold was a cup given by Anne Bayley in 1790 who once presented the pulpit Bible, which presumably was destroyed along with much else in the blitz of 1940. These gifts are mentioned in *Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel* (1884) by Sir Thomas Baker where the author says: 'These offerings tell of worshippers who set a high estate on their faith, and were grateful for the religious impressions that they received in that House of Prayer.'

If sources such as this had been consulted before the sale then at least the correct provenance could have been given for such important historical pieces. They are not hard to find either, many of them are online these days including GE Evans's *Vestiges of Protestant Dissent* (1897) which can be downloaded from the GA website and gives an authentic description of these pieces.

The trustees also sold the communion silver of the Strangeways congregation. This was a much more working-class congregation situated in a poorer area of the city and

(Continued on next page)

Liverpool Unitarians in focus

Liverpool Unitarians, Faith and Action

Book Review

By Alan Ruston

David Steers in his introduction to *Liverpool Unitarians Faith and Action*, a book of essays exploring the lives and contributions to society of notable Unitarian figures in Liverpool, states it's not intended to be hagiography. In other words there is no intention to sing the praises of a certain group of people – members of a particular faith community with deep historical roots but with an aversion to fixed creeds – who were inspired to serve others in different ways. Critics of Unitarianism may well want to argue differently but the story of their contribution to Liverpool is so rich and varied that it's difficult to deny the significant legacy of Unitarians. They are not being over-praised.

Nine writers have put together a finely produced popular work with plenty of pictures – there are no references so beloved of academics so it's easy to read. At the centre is the Ancient Chapel of Toxteth, founded and built in 1618, from which the Unitarian causes of the city have stemmed. However it's the individuals who stand out. We read for example of William Roscoe, a cultural giant in his time who did much to secure the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 – in opposition to many in Liverpool who relied on it for their income including, it has to be said, numerous Unitarians. Then there are the families – the Holts, the Rathbones, the Brunners, the Boults (from whom came the conductor Sir Adrian Boult) and the Jones family who did much to found the University of Liverpool.

The big wide ranging thinkers like James Martineau and Joseph Blanco White are covered as well as the more humble like the Rev John Johns who died working amongst poorest and Kitty Wilkinson, a washer-woman, who founded the

first public wash-house in Liverpool. The rich are there who did social good with their money like Sir Henry Tate, the sugar magnate, who besides giving the Tate Gallery in London, supported much of importance in Liverpool life. This listing is not exhaustive.

While parts of the story have been told before, the whole is presented in a modern and readable style.

There are unusual sections

included, for example an analysis of the inscriptions in the large Ancient Chapel graveyard and a look at the Chapel's visitor's book, not an aspect I've seen tackled before.

Perhaps you're someone not interested in Unitarian history but this story has much to tell us all. In my view readers of this book will come to the conclusion that Unitarianism has not been just a faith of the mind but one of action as well. We need to take forward its theme of being socially relevant in our locality in order to give our faith an active and living message in the 21st century.

Liverpool Unitarians Faith and Action, edited by Daphne Roberts and David Steers, Merseyside District Missionary Association, 2014. ISBN-10: 0992903106. Price £12.99 plus postage, ordered through Philip Waldron, Ullet Road Church, 57 Ullet Road, Sefton Park, Liverpool, L17 2AA, or liverpoolunitarians@gmail.com.



Communion silver was sold on eBay

(Continued from previous page)

founded in 1838. It had as its minister for over 20 years the first principal of Unitarian College Manchester, the Rev John Relly Beard. I would think that these items of silver plate are all that physically remains from this once bold and energetic congregation. When it closed in the early 20th century I wonder if those who deposited the silver with the trustees of Cross Street did so in perpetuity, or, until the opportunity would come for them to knock them out at public auction for £90?

The Strangeways communion silver pieces were subsequently sold on eBay, where I purchased them, to return them to the family, so to speak. I paid more than £90, but not too much. I think the price was raised a bit because these pieces had also been given the bogus provenance of having once belonged to William and Elizabeth Gaskell!

Some readers of this will sympathise entirely with my view. Others will find it hard to fathom. However, there are lessons to be learnt from this unfortunate event. Firstly it is that trustees should not sell material which they do not understand. There are always experts in different fields who



David Steers

should be consulted. Secondly they have a responsibility to the historical record and if, either because of penury or a desire just to be shot of something, they do decide to dispose of them then it may be appropriate to consider making a donation to a museum or similar institution. Thirdly, if you have to sell, make sure that whoever does the selling gets the story right. It is a shame when the historical record is polluted by bogus stories which once released onto the internet cannot easily be cleansed.

Ken Johnson, the trustees' representative said: 'There was no real prospect they would ever be used for their original purpose.' As minister to three congregations which regularly hold services of communion, I can at least say that this is no longer the case for the communion plate from Strangeways Chapel.

The Rev David Steers is editor of 'Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society' and is minister at Downpatrick, Ballee and Clough congregations in Northern Ireland. He served his student pastorate at Cross Street Chapel 1987-88.

Letters to the Editor

Doris still wants us to communicate

To the Editor:

Thank you, my dears, for your kind wishes. (*Inquirer*, 27 September) I do hope to return occasionally when I have something to say. I felt I was getting a bit repetitive.

I clearly had been more subtle that it is normally my wont to be. When I was convenor of the Visibility Strategy Group I harassed everyone in sight to write to the Unitarian press to share their successes and, possibly, encourage others to try something new.

Angela Maher devised a nice logo that would be used to highlight these mini-articles. We even gave out hundreds of postcards. I had the hope that 'What we are doing that is interesting and you might like to try', would become a regular feature. Practically no response.

I had an idea/vision/daydream that if congregations would do this, eventually Upper Pocklington would notice, get supercilious because no one else had held a flower festival-cum-white elephant stall and, finally, write to *The Inquirer*.

When their name appeared in print they would pin the article on the notice board and refer to it often. This would give Miss C, who loves to knit, the courage to suggest tentatively that, as Christ Church was knitting baby clothes, perhaps they could do the same and she had some rather nice patterns for bonnets.

The group would start, small at first but grow ... so what would happen next? You tell me. This is not just my dream. Getting all congregations to open their doors a little wider is the target for all of us.

And don't say growth to me. It will make us better Unitarians. Which means better people – happier, more responsive, more in tune with the people around us. Do you agree? Then, do something. You really don't need some old besom hectoring you once a month. You are perfectly capable of talking to each other and of writing to *The Inquirer* to let all of us know about your little triumphs and of your little changes and of ...

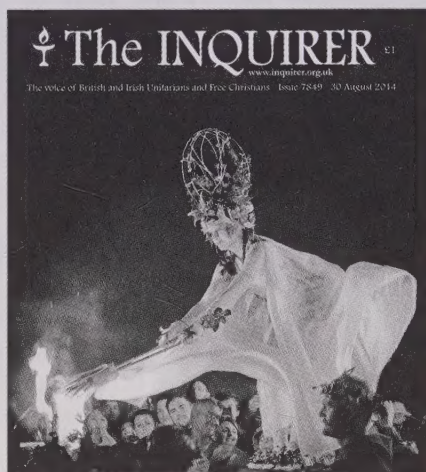
If you go into a Catholic (Roman or Anglican) church for a service you are often asked: 'Are you a communicant?'

The Unitarian equivalent is or should be: 'Do you communicate?'

All the best,

Dorothy Haughton

Dorothy is the writer of 'Doris's Column' which may appear occasionally in 'The Inquirer'. And, yes, the editor is always happy to receive articles and photographs about what congregations and fellowships are doing.



Celebrating Pagan Festivals

Pagan celebrations have regional differences

To the Editor:

I was interested to see the neo-pagan piece written by Yvonne Aburrow and entitled 'Celebrating the return of the light' (*The Inquirer*, 30 August and 13 September) which makes particular reference to Midsummer and to Lammas. It is fascinating to see suggestions for Unitarian celebrations to focus on these events, one relating to the summer solstice, the other to a 'quarter day' (as observed in the Irish traditional year). Indeed, the suggestions for the midsummer celebration include references to 'Beltane' (Bealtaine), another Celtic quarter day.

To be brief, there is a very considerable available amount of scholarship on European seasonal customs, and I would point out that there is also a substantial amount of variation as to when and how specific customs are marked in continuous and in 'revived' traditions. This is not to make a

value judgment on Ms Aburrow's suggestions, as in my opinion any recognition of spiritual values, or perhaps 'Pagan ideals', is to be welcomed. Noting Ms Aburrow's reference to John Barleycorn, I would simply like to add that for instance in Ireland, midsummer has long been celebrated as St John's Eve, and in some places still is. St John's Eve in this case refers to St John the Baptist, whose feast day is 24 June. Incidentally, in terms of solstices, the feast day of St John the Divine is 27 December. Plus ça change?

Linda M Ballard

President, Society for Folklife Studies, and member of All Souls Non Subscribing Presbyterian congregation, Belfast

Fund available to promote cohesion

To the Editor:

I recently attended the AGM of Nottingham Inter Faith Council and learned about a new charity that has been set up in conjunction with the Church Urban Fund to promote community cohesion. The organisation is called Near Neighbours and it has been set up to target specific towns and cities.

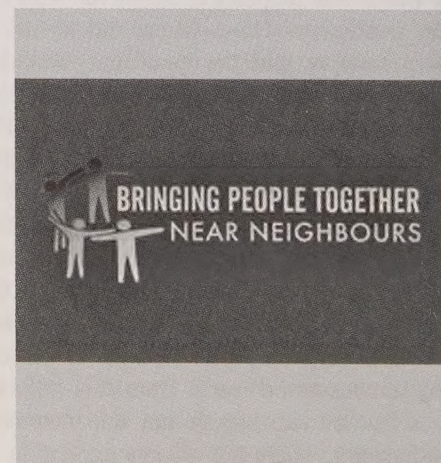
Grants are for £250-£5,000 and details can be found on www.near-neighbours.org.uk.

There is also a project called Catalyst that is being funded by Near Neighbours that runs training schemes for young people who are potential leaders. It is based at St. Philip's Centre in Leicester. Details from Rias Ravat on 0116 273 3459. Or email: Riaz.Ravat@stphilipscentre.co.uk.

Riaz Ravat

Zoe Bremer

Nottingham Unitarians



GA President Celia Kerr: full of kindness

By Celia Cartwright

In Unitarian circles no one is ever very far removed from another Unitarian. The web of connections is strong, and the Kerrs were no shirkers at knitting the silken threads of friendship. My mother was just one recipient of the kindness they both dispensed on her occasional respite holidays in the Lakes, taking her to lunch after chapel. So when I came to minister here at Kendal eight years ago, I already knew at least one family. By then Celia had taken her spiritual searching to the Spiritualists, but it didn't stop her being part of my circle of friends and a pastoral concern. Visits to Garnet Bridge and lately to Dunmail Drive in Kendal, were welcoming, joyful, interesting and peppered with laughter.

Celia was born in Newcastle on 27 April 1947, the baby of the family, born in the midst of a war that had seen her elder siblings evacuated. So it was a while before the family was united. Celia left school without A-levels but her sister Jo saw the potential and suggested Celia train as a nurse, and at Newcastle General Hospital she found her niche. Her first marriage and life in the small village of Lowick brought out a competitive streak in Celia, and she was to win the overall winner's cup at the local county show with her cookery, bakery and needlework. Celia strove to become part of the village life; in her first go at entering competitions at the county show, Celia won the cup for gaining the best overall marks in the fields of cookery, bakery and needlecraft.

Meeting Don Kerr, after her first marriage failed, was to change her life in a very positive way. They were married on 17 February 1977 and the couple set to managing a combined step-family of five children, Colin and Jennifer (hers), Neil, Jenny and Suzie (his). It wasn't always easy, but for Celia her new life with Don was the doorway into a very new and fulfilling chapter of her life.

To make a new start the family moved to Scotland, to West Caulder. It was here that, having found the local vicar's vision of Christianity narrow and judgmental, they looked for an alternative. In her youth Celia had been taken to Newcastle Unitarian church, and so a visit to Edinburgh's St Mark's Unitarian Church seemed worth a go. As Andrew Hill recalls, Celia, with Don's encouragement and support, became involved with the Edinburgh church and then the wider denomination, becoming the General Assembly President for the year 1992/3.

In 1996, Don retired and the couple moved to Windermere and later to . They discovered it was a busy urban town with a mass of visitors – not the quiet retirement spot they hoped for. They stuck it out for six years then moved to the very quiet hamlet of Garnet Bridge, Longsleddale. Celia's increasingly difficult journey with rheumatoid arthritis meant the house was filled with devices to ease her life, and the bedroom was settled on the ground floor, giving Celia a view of the garden she loved and the valley which delighted her eyes, and sometimes that tumbling beck, and a place to rest with a cat at her side for company. The recent move into Kendal was of necessity rather than lifestyle choice, and to be closer to friends.

Celia's health deteriorated at a seemingly ever-increasing speed in the last few years, and life became more and more constrained. Life was made more tragic when Celia's daughter Jennifer, died in a fall. It was a tragedy Celia never fully recovered from, though she continued to care for people, offering comfort to those in need, and seeking ever to understand the meaning of human life and not allowing her sense of fun and humour to disappear. Of life with Celia, Don says, 'We laughed more than we cried'. In the balance of life it's not a bad epitaph.

The Rev Celia Cartwright is minister at Kendal.

The Rev Pat Wormsley: dedicated and caring

7 February 1928 – 16 May 2014

By Linda McCarthy and Kath Ryder

Pat moved to Torquay with her husband Leslie in the late 1960s, early 70s. Whilst bringing up her children, John and Hester, she taught English at Torbay Grammar School. In 1980 she became Lay Leader of the Torquay church and after training for the ministry became minister at Torquay, Plymouth and later Cullompton. She continued to take services until recently and supported Brian Packer during his tenure as minister to the Devon and Somerset Link Area Ministry. Her ministry at Cullompton continued until shortly before her death in May.

At Cullompton her commitment was not only to the congregation but also to the local people, some of whom had past family connections to the chapel and saw it as the natural place to celebrate baptisms and weddings and Pat the kindest and most sympathetic person to help them fulfil their wishes.

I remember first meeting Pat at a Western Union AGM at Cullompton more than 20 years ago and then it was only fleetingly – when, in my usual place – the kitchen. Just when I was hoping to have a cup of tea and showing my annoyance to anyone who asked for a second cup, a very petite lady with a soft voice and a friendly smile approached the serving hatch and asked so politely 'is there another cup in the pot'? Well

what could I say? Since that time Pat has been my inspiration and I will always remember her for her tolerant, caring outlook on life, understanding circumstances, never judging, always there in times of need, with an offer of help or advice.

Pat was instrumental in keeping the Chapel at Cullompton open and worked tirelessly within the community, she will be greatly missed.

And after my first meeting with Pat there was always 'another cup in the pot'!

Ministers who knew her well speak of her as a dedicated and caring minister, a gifted pastoral counsellor; kind, knowledgeable and filled with humility. In addition to her commitment to Cullompton for the past 20 years, she was a Cruse counsellor and spent much time at the Rowcroft Hospice

The recent memorial service at Cullompton was conducted by the Rev Lindy Latham, supported by Bob Cook on the organ, and attended by many from the Western Union who were anxious to pay their tribute to a remarkable minister and friend.

Pat was a wonderful woman who gave so very much to so many people, she will be missed by more people than we can imagine.



Newcastle Unitarians reach out at Green Festival

Newcastle Unitarians staffed a stall at the Newcastle Community Green Festival, hoping to encounter like-minded individuals who would be interested in hearing about our message. Now in its 19th year, the Newcastle Community Green Festival happens each June and exists to “spread a message of environmental protection and social justice”.

We rolled up on Saturday, 7 June at Leazes Park beneath an ominous sky, and set out our stall of posters, leaflets, free cake, badges, and Unitarians happy to talk about our faith.

Three hours later, the heavens opened, and from then the Saturday became something of a mud bath. Did it matter? No. We were having a great time. Based in the big blue Information Tent, we encountered many people, from the genuinely curious, to those who had dashed in to avoid the weather, to people who were happy to stop, pick up a free badge and some cake, and have a chat about Unitarianism into the bargain. The most commonly asked questions were “What’s Unitarianism? I’ve never heard of it” and “What are your core beliefs?” Most people were open-minded and happy to hear about it, even if one or two decided it wasn’t for them.

Meeting the other stall volunteers was a very enjoyable part of the festival. We encountered people ranging from Sea Shepherd to the North East Humanists and the Green Party, several of whom expressed an interest in Unitarianism (or at least in hiring the church’s rooms). We tweaked our stall a little to make it less cluttered, and more clearly about Unitarianism. Each time we run our stall, we learn a little more about how to do it better. The banners were a huge success. Seeing the Newcastle Unitarian banner proudly standing alongside the other organisations’ flags at the tent entrance was a very happy moment. All in all, it was a success and a very enjoyable way to spend a weekend.

— Louise Reeve

Channing Lecture by the Rev Dr Ann Peart

The title of the lecture is, *‘Help to Correct Me’: William Ellery Channing and British Unitarians*. It will take place on Saturday, 1 November at 6 pm at Golders Green Unitarians, Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS. Admission £5, which will be donated to the Clara Barton Disasters Emergency Appeal (British Red Cross Iraq Crisis Appeal) and the Golders Green Unitarians organ restoration fund.

An historian with a particular academic interest in the achievements of Unitarian women, Ann Peart (*right*) is a former Principal of Unitarian College Manchester and chair of the Unitarian General Assembly’s Social Responsibility Panel, and of the Ministry Commission.

The quotation in the title of Dr Peart’s lecture comes from a letter Channing wrote to Unitarian writer Lucy Aikin. ‘In looking



over my letter I see that I have written too dogmatically. I rather intended to give you my views that I may obtain yours. I am too far from you to judge the true state of your country, and perhaps my error is always that I overlook details, and judge too much by general principles. Help to correct me.’

If you want further details please contact the Rev Feargus O’Connor at ggunirev@aol.com or on 020 7837 4472.

LDPA appoints interim district minister

The London District announced that the Rev John Carter has taken up the post of Interim District Minister for the LDPA.

He brings experience of working with congregations and other ministries in both the UK and USA, as well as serving the LDPA as a council member for four years.

This position is for a quarter time with primary responsibilities for newsletters, quarterly meetings and FUSE, as well as ongoing District pastoral care.

The Rev Carter, who recently completed his studies at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, said, “I look forward to working closely with the Council and with Danielle Wilson in the care



and implementation of our ongoing district ministries during this time of transition. I thank you for the opportunity to serve the LDPA in this manner.”

Women’s group looks through lenses

The Unitarian Women’s Group is planning an Autumn Weekend Gathering at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow in Derbyshire. The theme is “Life through a Lens”. Do you see everything through rose-tinted glasses, or does life look blue to you? Come and explore the different lenses we see our lives through in a weekend of discussion, creativity and lots of laughter. All Unitarian women are welcome. It takes place 24 October to 26 October. For more information, contact: Angela by email: amaher@theiet.org or phone Kate 07870 322 519.